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SUBJECT: KINSHASA SITREP 4: MILITARY CLAIMS TO BE GAINING  
CONTROL IN KINSHASA

REF: KINSHASA 353 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Sporadic shooting continued into the afternoon around the Embassy compound in the Gombe district of Kinshasa. Automatic weapons fire and several loud explosions have been heard since midday. Military officials with FARDC Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Kisempia Sunglinga claim their troops are gaining the "upper hand" in Kinshasa against the guard forces of Jean-Pierre Bemba. They told us the current shooting is part of "mop-up" operations against Bemba's guards fleeing his former official residence on Boulevard de 30 Juin. While FARDC officials contend they are in control of the city, Post has received multiple but unverified reports nearby Ndolo airport was temporarily occupied by Bemba's forces. The DRC's Air Force maintains a small base adjacent to Ndolo. Post assesses that resistance by Bemba's forces is rapidly decreasing, with a potential pocket of Bemba troops possibly remaining in the Ndolo area.

¶2. (U) EAC convened at 11:30 a.m. at 4:00 p.m. The committee unanimously decided to request authorized departure for family members, which will be forwarded septel. An additional warden message was sent midday out advising all AmCits to remain in their present positions. The EAC will meet again at 4:00 p.m.

¶3. (SBU) There are no reports of AmCit casualties from the fighting. Three AmCits were successfully extracted from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where they had spent the evening. All were safely returned to the nearby Grand Hotel. Two other AmCits were later extracted from the DRC's Migration Authority when they had been since fighting erupted and taken to the Memling Hotel. Several other AmCits remain in at least two locations in the Gombe area and are unable to leave their positions.

¶4. (SBU) A small group of about eight Congolese, including women and children, climbed over the wall of the JAO complex in the early afternoon. After an audible warning was given over the loudspeaker system, the intruders left the compound. The windows at the residences of two Mission employees were damaged by gunfire on March 23.

¶5. (SBU) AmCit and local businessman Cameron Burns reported to EconOff earlier today one of his boats in the Kinshasa area was seized the morning of March 23 by armed men believed to be from Bemba's guard force. Burns said the boat, which was carrying nearly 150 tons of sugar, cement and other provisions, was taken in the Maluku area upriver from Kinshasa. Burns later reported the boat and the material was returned to his crew.

¶6. (SBU) Businesses remain closed in Gombe although there are a small number of pedestrians along 30 Juin. Witnesses report roads were mostly empty but there was some public transportation. Some foot and vehicle traffic has reportedly resumed in the area of the Grand Hotel.

¶7. (SBU) MONUC officials report nearly 100 members of Bemba's guard have surrendered to MONUC peacekeepers. A total of 64 AK-47 rifles and two RPGs have been recovered. The surrendering forces are being temporarily detained at MONUC's headquarters in Gombe. Other reports suggest that Bemba troops are also shedding uniforms and melting into the community.

¶8. (U) MONUC's Radio Okapi, quoting hospital sources, reported at least seven killed and 30 wounded, including military and civilians. MONUC military officials said they have reports of at least seven FARDC soldiers and seven of Bemba's guards killed.

¶9. (SBU) The petroleum pipeline from Matadi in Bas-Congo province to Kinshasa was shut off the morning of March 23. Port officials told us operations in Matadi are proceeding normally, and trucks from the port are leaving from Kinshasa. It is not yet clear if the vehicles are entering Kinshasa.

¶10. (SBU) Bemba remains at the South African Ambassador's residence in Gombe. As reported reftel, the GDRC reportedly issued an arrest warrant for the former vice president, charging him with treason and organizing a private militia. President Kabila has not yet made any public statements about the fighting.

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